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DEPT TO ANGEL CIELO, USDA/APHIS/IS, PANAMA  
DEPT TO DAN SHEESLEY, USDA/APHIS/IS, WASHINGTON, DC  
DEPT TO CRAIG FEDCHOCK, USTR, WASHINGTON, DC  
DEPT ANTONIO RAMIREZ, USDA/APHIS/VS, RIVERDALE, MD  
DEPT CATHERINE FULTON, USDA/APHIS/IS/TST, WASHINGTON DC  
DEPT TO USTR FOR VARGO, MALITO, JOHNSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAGR ECON

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: RENEWAL OF USDA/SEA  
COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

¶11. Summary. On April 26, 2005, USDA renewed their bilateral Cooperative Agreement with the Dominican Republic (DR) Department of Agriculture (SEA) for a second five-year period. This is the second USDA Bilateral Agreement signed by the Fernandez Administration. The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to strengthen technical cooperation, especially on animal and plant health programs. The impetus was the outbreak of Classical Swine Fever (CSF) in the DR 1997, endangering the Nation's food security, including the multi-billion dollar U.S. pork industry, with 600,000 jobs, and the pork and pork product export market valued at more than \$1 billion. The Ambassador met with the DR Secretary of Agriculture prior to the ceremony, and answered press inquiries afterwards. End Summary.

¶12. On April 26, 2005, USDA renewed their bilateral Cooperative Agreement with the Dominican Republic (DR) Department of Agriculture (SEA). The original agreement had been signed in Washington, DC on April 27, 2000 and covered a five-year period thereafter. Agriculture Secretary Amilcar Romero signed for the Dominican government. APHIS Associate Administrator Dr. Peter Fernandez signed for USDA Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns. The Ambassador was also present. All three made brief remarks during the signing ceremony. This is the second Bilateral Agreement signed by the Fernandez Administration, the first being the &McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program8, signed by President Leonel Fernandez and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman on August 17, the

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morning after Fernandez, inauguration.

Background

¶13. The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to strengthen technical cooperation, especially on animal and plant health programs. The impetus was the outbreak of Classical Swine Fever (CSF) in the Dominican Republic in 1997, having spread from Haiti, where it was first detected in 1996. APHIS determined that it needed to respond to the CSF risk from the island of Hispaniola with the ultimate aim of preventing the disease from reaching the United States. Mitigating the CSF risk would serve to: (1) protect the multi-billion dollar U.S. pork industry, including 600,000 jobs, and (2) to maintain the Nation's food security and the pork and pork product export market valued at more than \$1 billion.

¶14. The first Cooperative Agreement entailed two objectives. The first objective was to provide technical assistance in helping the Dominican Republic strengthen and streamline their quarantine services in order to build a stronger animal and plant health infrastructure. The second objective included development of the Passenger Predeparture Inspection Programs (PPIP) at the international airports and ferry terminal. Under the renewed agreement, the USDA will continue plant and animal health initiatives begun during the past five years, and also provide additional training and support in the area of animal disease diagnostic laboratories.

¶15. Both the new and old agreements allow USDA to transfer funds to the GDR for these programs, which also include a component to modernize the animal health and quarantine system to prevent future outbreaks of foreign animal diseases. APHIS has already spent millions of dollars responding to the CSF outbreak, participating in the multi-national eradication effort. The yearly budget for PPIP averages \$850,000. APHIS funds are placed in the SEA account to pay the salaries of the SEA-PPIP inspectors who perform the inspections. APHIS has also purchased X-Ray machines, computers, office equipment and furniture for the offices and uniforms and badges for the inspectorate. CSF eradication funds have purchased vaccine, and provided computers, field equipment, motorcycles and vehicles. Training and upgrading of veterinary laboratories are other areas where USDA funding is improving the animal and plant health infrastructure of the DR.

16. The Dominican government in particular has made strides in eradication, with ongoing support from the public and private sectors. With international assistance, Haiti has also begun to tackle the CSF outbreak there. The two countries must both complete the eradication for the program to be successful. Because of these efforts, APHIS has built important relationships with the Ministries of Agriculture in the DR and Haiti.

Side Meeting

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17. Before the Signing Ceremony the Ambassador, DCM Lisa Kubiske, and APHIS Attaché Carolyn Cohen met briefly with Secretary Romero, several Under Secretaries and a

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representative of Banco Agricola. The Secretary raised several issues with the Ambassador. After some general remarks about CAFTA and agricultural trade, he spoke about the DR's desire to export beef products to the United States. (Currently, the DR cannot export meat products to the United States because slaughter houses do not meet US federal requirements for sanitation, nor is their Meat Inspection Program implemented with equivalently rigorous standards as for the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). A visit by FSIS last year highlighted areas of weakness.) The Secretary expressed hopes that a second visit by FSIS later in the year would lead to a determination of equivalency, allowing exports. The Secretary expressed interest in starting a Commodity Preclearance Program for export of avocados (and possibly other fruits and vegetables) to the United States. Attaché Cohen mentioned that preclearance was expensive and not required for commodities that are already being shipped successfully, entering at U.S. Ports of Entry with visual inspection, but she promised to discuss the proposal with SEA's Plant Health staff. Other topics touched upon briefly included closer cooperation on veterinary laboratories, the Secretary's planned visit to Chile in May, and the CSF eradication efforts.

Press Questions

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18. In the post-signing question-and-answer period with the press, the Ambassador answered a question about USDA restrictions, on imports of avocados. He explained that the United States has not changed its system of agricultural marketing and that Dominican exporters are subject to the same restrictions as U.S. producers. Dr. Fernandez answered a question regarding funding for the Cooperative Agreement, explaining that funding is dependent on Congressional allocations to APHIS.

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